

VZCZCXYZ2612
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHYN #0366/01 0630957
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
R 030957Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY SANAA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9081
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUCNSOM/SOMALI COLLECTIVE
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0241
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0221
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0240
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0120
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0169
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

S E C R E T SANAA 000366

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/02/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: WHO HAS THE EAR OF THE PRESIDENT? PART 3:
FOREIGN POLICY

REF: A. 07 SANAA 2196
[1](#)B. SANAA 46
[1](#)C. SANAA 240

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) President Ali Abdullah Saleh holds all decision-making authority within Yemen. Nonetheless, he relies on an established network of advisors who have obtained his trust and respect. This is the third in a series of cables that intends to develop a fuller understanding of who influences Saleh's decision-making and governance. Previous cables have given a broad overview of President Saleh's advisors and examined influential players on reform issues (refs A and B). This cable examines who specifically affects his decisions concerning foreign policy. Future cables will examine who influences the President's thinking on issues ranging from counterterrorism to tribal affairs.

[1](#)2. (C) According to several Yemeni government officials and academics, Yemen's foreign policy towards the United States has been inconsistent since 2006 because President Saleh has not had a regular advisor on this issue since Doctor AbdulKarim al-Eryani's influence began to wane. Northwest Regional Commander Ali Muhsin and Yemen's Ambassador to the United States AbdulWahab al-Hajjri are vying to fill this gap. Former Prime Minister and Secretary General of the ruling GPC Abdul Qader Bajamal may also have a growing impact. Regarding Yemeni foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia and other gulf countries, there appears to be an unfilled void left by Shaykh Abdullah al-Ahmar's December 2007 death, and several individuals seem to be vying for Saleh's ear on this topic. Yemeni public opinion, more than any advisor, appears to inform Saleh's Palestinian policy. Leaders of the Yemeni intelligence community and the newly formed Sana'a Forum are the major players on the Horn of Africa. European diplomats credit the Foreign Minister and al-Eryani with key roles in EU policy. With the exception of EU policy, however, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is seen to have virtually no influence on foreign policy decision-making, especially on more important topics such as U.S. and Gulf states policy.
End Summary

FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES

¶3. (C) According to several Yemeni government officials and academics, Yemen's foreign policy towards the United States has been inconsistent since 2006 because President Saleh has not had a regular advisor on this issue since that time. According to Shaykh Nabil al-Basha, a GPC Member of Parliament on the Foreign Relations Committee, Senior Presidential Advisor Doctor AbdulKarim al-Eryani had been Saleh's most influential advisor and had been a strong advocate for positive relations with the United States for at least a decade. However, Basha and many other contacts believe that al-Eryani's influence has waned considerably since 2006. Moreover, al-Eryani has not been replaced and therefore Saleh has been making more decisions on his own, which has resulted in inconsistent decision-making.

¶4. (S) Basha opined that part of al-Eryani's reduced influence has been of his own choosing, but equally as important has been Northwest Regional Commander Ali Muhsin's increasing influence in foreign policy matters regarding the United States. Basha indicated Ali Muhsin's stature and influence with Saleh on foreign policy matters has risen over the past several years. Moreover, he is considered a negative influence on Yemeni-U.S. relations since he is not a strong supporter of the United States. He is reportedly an Islamist sympathizer who has been known to collude with extremist leaders. (Comment: In spite of Basha's remarks, Post notes that, during this period, Saleh has made efforts to draw closer to the United States. This implies that other factors are offsetting Muhsin's influence. One factor is probably Ambassador al-Hajjri (see para 5). Saleh's perceived personal relationship with President Bush, however, and his desire to benefit from increased foreign assistance via programs such as those of the Millennium Challenge

Corporation are also offsetting factors. End Comment.)

¶5. (S) Basha believes that rising to take al-Eryani's place, and trying to offset Muhsin's negative influence, is Yemen's Ambassador to the U.S. AbdulWahab al-Hajjri. Basha noted that al-Hajjri is married to Saleh's daughter and therefore may have his trust, but, because of his physical distance from Saleh, has not fully established himself as Saleh's closest advisor on the Yemeni/U.S. bilateral relationship. Al-Hajjri has a reputation as a "playboy" and is known to have several girlfriends. Should these facts come to the attention of the President, they could have a negative effect on al-Hajjri's position in his eyes.

¶6. (C) The President has been seen on more than one occasion to turn to his Secretary Faris Sanabani in meetings for factual information concerning the United States. This is more likely because of Sanabani's position as the President's secretary than his influence on United States issues.

SIPDIS

Sanabani lived in the United States for several years in the 1980s and received a degree from Eastern Michigan University in 1993. He was married for a time to an American woman and has two AMCIT children from that marriage.

¶7. (C) Ahmad Mohammed al-Kibsi, Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Political Science at Sana'a University and an expert on Yemeni foreign policy, claimed that the individuals with the most influence regarding Yemeni foreign policy towards the U.S. all have some connection to the United States. For example, Director of the National Security Bureau (NSB) and Presidential Office Director Doctor Ali al-Anisi, whom al-Kibsi identified as influential in crafting foreign policy towards the U.S., sent all his sons to college in the United States. Al-Kibsi also identified President Saleh's son Ahmad Saleh (commander of the YSOF, Yemen's Special Forces, and widely believed to be being groomed to succeed his father) as another influential figure who studied in the States.

¶8. (C) Several other advisors in the foreign policy realm were identified by contacts, though the influence of these

individuals seems more tangential. Al-Kibsi claimed Shura Council Chairman AbdulAziz AbdulGhanim and Shura Council Member Mohammed al-Tayyib were influential regarding foreign policy towards the United States. Mohammed Yahya al-Sabri, a Member of Parliament from the Nasiri Wahdawi Party and spokesman for the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), believes GPC Secretary General (and former Prime Minister) Abdul Qader Bajamal has sway with President Saleh regarding foreign policy decisions towards the United States. Sabri believes Bajamal's influence has grown over the last several years as al-Eryani's has waned.

FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS GULF STATES

¶9. (C) There was also general agreement that Shaykh Abdullah al-Ahmar carried the most influence regarding Yemeni foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia and the other gulf states prior to his passing in December 2007. His death seems to have left a void which has largely been filled by Saleh himself. Basha believes that Saleh will continue to fill this gap into the foreseeable future, but al-Kibsi sees several contenders for this new role, including Naji al-Shayaf, Shaykh for the Bakil tribe, Bajamal, and several other unnamed prominent businessmen. Al-Eryani traveled to Qatar early this year to sign the deal that reinvigorated the Qatari-backed cease-fire in the rebellious Yemeni province of Saada (ref C). None of post's contacts, however, identified al-Eryani as a player in the formulation of Yemen's Gulf policy.

FOREIGN POLICY CONCERNING THE PALESTINIANS

¶10. (C) On Palestinian issues, the two figures with the most influence on the President may well be Saleh himself and the Yemeni "street." In a February 20 conversation, Palestinian DCM Fayez Abdul Jawad cited two reasons for Saleh's continued efforts to act as a mediator with the Palestinians. He noted first that Saleh, like many Arabs, feels a kinship to his fellow Arabs and hopes for an end to what he sees as their abuse at the hands of the Israeli government. Jawad added

that Saleh is also aware of strong pro-Palestinian feelings among Yemeni citizens, and sees it in his interest to be perceived as a champion of the Palestinian cause. (Note: It is likely that Saleh also wishes to be seen as a strong regional leader and believes Palestinian issues provide him the ideal stage on which to do so. End Note.) Deputy Head of the MFA's Arab Countries Department Hasan Ali Elaiwa expressed a similar view. When asked what influenced Yemeni policy on Palestinian issues, he responded, "how can the government not respond to the feelings of the people?"

FOREIGN POLICY CONCERNING THE HORN OF AFRICA

¶11. (C) The ROYG has made a conscious decision to handle its bilateral relations with the Horn of Africa (HOA) through the newly established Sana,a Forum. This body, made up of representatives of Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, has its secretariat in Sana,a and will be chaired by Yemen for its first three years. According to Ethiopian DCM Dr. Abdulkadir Risku, the ROYG has chosen Ambassador Mohammed Abdullah Wazir (NFI) to be the organization's first Secretary General. (Note: Post is seeking further

SIPDIS

information on Wazir. Risku emphasized to POL/E Chief that Wazir's appointment has not been officially announced and asked for discretion in handling this name until it is. End Note.) When pressed, Dr. Risku was unable to identify any other key players on HOA issues, asserting that, to the best of his knowledge, Saleh made decisions relating to the Horn without consulting others.

¶12. (C) Post's DAO notes that Military Intelligence Director Ali Ahman As-Siyyani travels frequently to HOA and asks about HOA issues on a regular basis. This implies that he has a

specific interest in HOA and may play some role in HOA policy. Meanwhile, the National Security Bureau (NSB) has advised EMBOFFs that it, not the MFA, holds the Somalia portfolio. This would give NSB head al-Anisi a strong role in Horn issues, at least in the case of Somalia.

FOREIGN POLICY CONCERNING THE EUROPEAN UNION

¶13. (C) Perhaps because so many European countries are also donor countries, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) plays a role in ROYG policy towards the European Union. Dutch First Secretary Michiel van Campen specifically mentioned Deputy Prime Minister and MOPIC Minister Abdulkarim al-Arhabi as a key player in EU issues as well as Nabil Shaiban, Director of MOPIC's Office of Europe and the Americas. Van Campen, unlike many of Post's interlocutors, also credited Foreign Minister AbuBakr al-Qirbi as influential with the President on EU foreign policy issues, a view supported by a well-informed British diplomat. While stipulating the Qirbi was not empowered to make policy, this diplomat said that Saleh would turn over to the Foreign Minister those issues the President did not understand.

¶14. (C) Deputy Head of the MFA's European Department Abdulaziz Sallam cited al-Anisi as a key conduit between the Foreign Ministry and the President and one whose repackaging of inputs from the MFA has a strong effect on ROYG EU policy. He also cited Parliament Foreign Relations Committee chair Jubran Mujahid Abu Showarib as an EU policy player.

THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS?

¶15. (C) All contacts outside of the diplomatic corps and the Foreign Ministry itself agreed that Yemen's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has virtually no influence on Yemen's major foreign policy issues. Mohammed Abulahoum, the Head of the GPC's Foreign Relations Department and a member of the GPC's General Committee, estimated that 90 percent of foreign policy decisions are made outside the MFA. Abulahoum also claimed that the 10 percent controlled by the MFA consisted solely of minor issues which had nothing to do with foreign policy towards the U.S. or Gulf States.

¶16. (C) Other contacts claimed the MFA's influence was even lower than Abulahoum's estimate. Basha and al-Kibsi, for

example, claimed that the MFA had virtually no impact on Yemen's foreign policy decisions and certainly had no influence regarding the United States. Al-Kibsi emphasized this point by noting that the Foreign Minister was formerly a Professor at Sana'a University in the Faculty of Medicine and specialized in chemistry, not foreign policy. Finally, Basha added that the Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee, of which he is a member, is without influence.

¶17. (C) MFA officials understandably rose to the defense of their Ministry and, in particular, their Minister. Sallam, while conceding that the Minister's influence was limited, asserted that it was greater than that of his predecessors. To support this claim, Sallam said that Qirbi had managed to fill 80 percent of Ambassadorial positions with career diplomats, while under previous Foreign Ministers the total was closer to 30 percent. Elaiwa scoffed at those who downplayed the influence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. "They always say the Minister (of Foreign Affairs) has no influence," he told POL/E Chief on February 24. "If that is the case, then why is it that those who they say have influence, like Bajamal and al-Eryani, are former Foreign Ministers?"

COMMENT

¶18. (C) The general sentiment among Post's contacts is that there are competing camps vying for Saleh's attention, and,

for this reason, policy towards the U.S. has been inconsistent. While sometimes Ali Muhsin has the upper-hand, other times al-Hajjri exerts his power as a more positive influence. It was unclear why exactly Doctor al-Eryani's influence has waned, but it is possible his age and desire to withdraw somewhat from Yemeni political life has contributed to the phenomenon. The claims regarding the MFA's lack of influence on foreign policy decisions may be exaggerated. It seems, however, hard to argue that the MFA is a power-player given that its lack of influence remains such a common theme with our interlocutors. In any event, it is not clear that this institutional weakness extends in all cases to the Foreign Minister, who appears to enjoy some personal influence with Saleh. End Comment.
SECHE